

# Statesman Journal

Estimated printed pages: 2

May 17, 2005

Section: Life

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## 'Company' a worthy record of director's career

*Staff*

'Company'

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, with a 2 p.m. Saturday matinee

Where: Building 6 Auditorium, Chemeketa Community College, 4000 Lancaster Drive NE, Salem

Cost: \$14, \$10 for students and seniors

Call: (503) 399-5131

BY RON COWAN

Statesman Journal

Rodgers & Hammerstein carved out the issues and Americana musical territory, and Lerner & Loewe captured the melodic romance musical, but Stephen Sondheim has specialized in the concept musical, such as "Company," now playing at Chemeketa Community College.

Although director Ted Desel has softened Sondheim's sardonic, cynical touch, this still is a show that speaks to the sadder but wiser side of romance, a mood that comes across in this surprisingly sophisticated production.

The show missed a few beats and betrayed some cast nervousness in the first act on opening night Thursday, but by act two, the show clicked merrily along, with the cast gaining strength and confidence.

The theme of "Company," which has a libretto by George Furth, is the dilemma of Robert (Doug Moxley), a bachelor turning 35 and contemplating singlehood and relationships, reflecting on the lives of the married and divorced couples around him.

The city of New York forms the backdrop, providing the emotional texture in all its hip, rude, self-satisfied reality.

Each act begins and ends with the birthday party, the blowing out of candles on the cake. In between, Robert interacts with girlfriends and friends, illuminating their distinctive relationships (abrasive to affectionate) and attitudes about Robert: The women lament his singleness, the men envy his freedom and girlfriends. Robert just wonders what it's all about.

The music is some of Sondheim's best, including the title song and a rousing "Side by Side" that opens the second act and individual pieces like the rueful "Barcelona" (a duet for Robert and a stewardess date) and the hilarious, edgy "Getting Married Today," wonderfully sung by the gifted Emily Eikleberry as reluctant bride Amy.

The cast is particularly good in the ensemble numbers, although sometimes not well-coordinated as dancers, and there are plenty of standout solo numbers.

Particularly good is Terri Swanson as the much-married Joanne, with the acidic but bracing "The Ladies Who Lunch."

There are several notable voices, from sweet-voiced Haley Shell as Jenny to Moxley, who has the right kind of engaging personality and a voice that can shape a lyric to communicate emotion and ideas.

The ensemble is strong, including music director Ray Elliott's small orchestra, and Desel's direction keeps the action moving fluidly on the multi-level set by Terry Rohse.

The costumes by Mary Kate Lindbeck and Dee Montgomery-Smith, who doubles as choreographer, capture the eclectic and funky mood of the '70s setting.

"Company," the last show of Desel's career at Chemeketa due to his retirement, is a worthy record of what he has accomplished in a few years with sparse financial and technical resources.

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